

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A soil test apparatus for testing products in subterranean soil installations, said apparatus comprising:

a container for receiving soil and a product to be buried therein for testing;

said container having a base, sides and a top opening adapted directly or indirectly to receive a load;

wherein at least one of said sides is configured to permit some movement or deformation under application of said load to the soil in the container so as to simulate larger scale installation conditions.

2. A soil test apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the container is generally rectangular in plan, having two spaced apart side walls and two mutually opposing end walls, wherein at least two of said side walls and said end walls are configured to permit movement or deformation under the application of said load to said soil.

3. A soil test apparatus according to claim 2, wherein at least one of said side walls and said end walls is configured for resilient deformation in response to pressure transferred from compacted soil in the container.

4. A soil test apparatus according to claim 2, wherein at least one of said side walls and said end walls is substantially rigid and configured for outward movement against resilient biasing means in response to pressure transferred from compacted soil in the container.

5. A soil test apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said side walls are substantially rigid, and said end walls are configured for resilient deformation or displacement in response to the applied load.

6. A soil test apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the resilient biasing means include a leaf spring arrangement secured to a fixed frame forming part of the container.

7. A soil test apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising at least one viewing window formed in one of the sides of the container.

8. A soil test the apparatus according to claim 7, wherein at least two of said sides respectively includes one of said viewing windows.

9. A soil test apparatus according to claim 1, wherein at least one of said sides includes an access port positioned to facilitate access to the product during testing.

10. A soil test apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said access port is configured to permit remote access to measurement or data recordal apparatus.

11. A soil test apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising water introduction means to permit selective variation of moisture content in the soil during testing.

12. A soil test apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising heating means to permit a measure of selective temperature variation in the soil during testing.

13. A soil test apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising cooling means to permit a measure of selective temperature variation in the soil during testing.

14. A soil test apparatus according to claim 1, being adapted for testing pipe sections to simulate subterranean pipeline installations.

15. A soil test apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the side walls in use extend generally parallel to a longitudinal axis of the pipe section and the end walls extend generally transversely to said longitudinal axis.

16. A soil test apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the side walls in use extend generally transversely to a longitudinal axis of the pipe section and the end walls extend generally parallel to said longitudinal axis.

17. A soil test apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a lining member to minimise friction between the soil and the container.

18. A method of testing products in subterranean soil installations, said method comprising:

providing a container for receiving soil and a product to be buried therein for testing, said container having a base, sides and a top opening adapted directly or indirectly to receive a load, wherein at least one of said sides is configured to permit some movement or deformation under application of said load to the soil in the container so as to simulate larger scale installation conditions;

setting up the apparatus to permit some movement or deformation of at least one of the sides under predetermined load conditions;

partially filling the container with said soil;

positioning the product within the container;

burying the product by the addition of further soil;

applying said load to the soil via the top opening of the container; and

measuring an effect of the load on the product, the container, or the soil.

19. A method according to claim 18, wherein said measuring step includes measuring or monitoring, either continuously or intermittently, a parameter selected from the group consisting of stress or strain in the product; deformation, deflection, stress or strain in one or more of the sides of the container; compression, movement or pressure in the soil; and visual monitoring of the product.

20. A method according to claim 18, further comprising lining the container with a lining member, to minimise friction between the soil and the container.

21. A method according to claim 20, further comprising greasing the lining member.